

ON DRUMS

# Cymbal Success

Get the most crash  
for your cash

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**PICKING OUT** cymbals can be a time-consuming process. Whether you're out to buy a complete set or a single addition, the choices available can be overwhelming. This chapter of choosing your equipment will give some basic rules and insights regarding cymbals.

## Weighing In

A few key considerations are the type of music you play, the size of the band you play with, and the sizes of the

rooms you play in. Less critical, but a big factor for some, is cosmetics, as in regular buffed finish versus a reflective "brilliant" finish (which gives a bit more "edge" to the sound).

Rules to remember: Smaller, lighter cymbals react quickly, but have shorter sustain; heavier, larger cymbals have slower reaction and longer sustain. Also, the heavier a particular size cymbal, the higher the pitch. Another point to consider is that cast cymbals (such as Sabian and Zildjian) all sound different, even if the size, weight, and type are identical, due to certain manufacturing variances. So a 16-inch thin crash in a store's display may not have the same exact sound as one in a shop down the street, so trying to precisely match the sound of your once treasured, now broken cymbal can be a trial. Other brands like Paiste and Meinl are fairly uniform.

Speaking of cracked and broken cymbals, I must stress the fact that loud, heavy players should stay away from small, thin cymbals. Overworking a thin cymbal with heavy sticks to get more volume will cause rapid damage to the cymbal (as will hitting the cymbal improperly). Likewise, if you're buying used instead of new, look for cracks, dents, or other signs of misuse.

## Bring Your Ears

Whether you're buying one cymbal or a full set, it's quite okay to mix cymbal brands in your setup. Each manufacturer has its own sounds to offer, and I can only suggest you don't be too close-minded.

Besides your ears, you should bring a few other things with you when shopping. Bring along the stick you use, as different lengths, weights, and beads will give vastly different cymbal sounds. If you're after a single cymbal as an add-on or replacement, bring your other

cymbals, to hear how the new one blends in tonally. And, so you can hear how the cymbal sounds "in the audience," bring a friend to play the cymbal while you stand away from it.

A basic setup consists of a ride, two crashes, and a hi-hat. Of course, there are other cymbal types you can add to this for effects, such as splash,

open, and also play them with the footpedal to hear the closed "chick." To judge the blending of tones, use the pedal to lightly "ring" the cymbals off each other. If you're after volume, you'll get it with larger hi-hats, but will trade off with slower response time. Smaller hi-hats speak more quickly but will generate less volume.

## Smaller, lighter cymbals react quickly, but have shorter sustain.

china/swish, bell cymbal, and 10- and 13-inch auxiliary hi-hats. In order of popularity, cymbal sizes range: Ride: 20-, 22-, 18-inch; Crash: 16-, 18-, 17-, 14-inch; Hi-hats: 14-, 13-, 15-inch; China: 18-, 20-, 16-inch; Splash: 8-, 10-, 12-inch. Cymbal company catalogs are great sources of information regarding sounds, setups, etc., so read through them to familiarize yourself with everything available.

## Test Rides, Crashes

When checking out ride cymbals, play steady, consistent ride patterns, bell playing, and occasional crashing at the shoulder. Try various dynamic levels and listen to the degree of overtones and stick attack sounds. All these factors must be added up to help with your decision.

For crash cymbals, also try various dynamics, from a light touch to a loud swipe. Listen for the amount of decay/sustain, and to the direction of pitch. In the case of crash-ride cymbals, you'll want to try all these tests together.

## Hat Sizes

Use a quality stand when trying hi-hats, and adjust the clutch, bottom tilter, and the cymbal gap to the way you play. Listen to the cymbals played closed and partially

Keep in mind that the weight of the bottom cymbal determines the cutting power, while the top cymbal determines response and tone. Some players deviate from "factory-matched" pairs and experiment with different combinations of tops and bottoms to get the precise sound they're searching for. Zildjian and Sabian formulated their respective K/Z and Fusion hi-hats this way, and I've done it myself.

## It's in the Mail

Not to discredit mail order dealers, but personally, a cymbal is one thing I would never buy sight unseen, or unheard. You get whatever they send, and if the sound isn't what you want, well, too bad. It's much better to go to a well-stocked shop to try out the cymbals you want and hear them yourself. Better yet, if you are friends with the dealer, you may be able to arrange to borrow the cymbal for a night to try it on the gig.

Cymbal sounds are a personal, subjective thing. Only your ears can tell you what sounds good, and that is the basis for music itself.

*Bob Saydlowski, Jr., a regular columnist for Gig, recently did a piece on cymbals for Sabian's Newsbeat magazine.*